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DEPARTMENT FOR AF A/S FRAZER, AF/SPG, AND AF/SE
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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KPKO](#) [UN](#) [AU](#) [SU](#)
SUBJECT: S/E NATSIOS MEETS WITH GOVERNOR OF SOUTH DARFUR

Governor Warns of Focus on Tribal Divisions

¶1. (SBU) Meeting with S/E Natsios in Nyala on September 30, South Darfur Governor Ali Mahmoud explained that the current conflict had exacerbated tribal divisions. He criticized the peace process for re-inforcing these divisions and warned that if the parties to the conflict participated in negotiations along ethnic lines, tribal-based political parties would emerge and further undermine the region's stability. Nonetheless emphasizing the importance of a political solution to the Darfur conflict, Mahmoud said he was optimistic about the UN/AU peace talks scheduled to begin October 27 in Libya. He asked that the U.S. pressure the Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA) non-signatories to attend the negotiations. S/E Natsios reported that he had just returned from Zalingei, where he had pressed the Fur to participate in the talks.

¶2. (SBU) Mahmoud said that his own personal narrative--one Fur grandmother and one Zaghawa grandmother, in addition to his Taisha tribal Arab roots--illustrated the traditional ethnic mingling in Darfur. Rather than concentrating on tribal affiliations, the focus should be on inter-tribal dialogue, he suggested, noting that he was making progress in "breaking down barriers" through recent reconciliation conferences between the feuding Falata, Habaniya, and Salamat tribes. Mahmoud said that the Sudanese Government planned a broader reconciliation conference in Darfur near the end of October.

Call for Reconstruction and Development

¶3. (SBU) Noting that he had been the negotiator for the economic aspects of the Eastern Sudan Peace Agreement (ESPA), Mahmoud underscored the importance of reconstruction and development in Darfur to underpin a peace agreement. He thanked the U.S. for its humanitarian assistance programs in Darfur and claimed that food aid to the IDPs was "stable" and "not a critical situation." However, he said that Sudan still needed support from the international community to provide education, social services, health, and housing because of the Government's lack of capacity. Without any sense of irony, he noted that Sudan had no money to rebuild people's houses in Darfur and asked for American help. Mahmoud alleged that there had been a "spontaneous and voluntary" return of many IDPs to their homes, and they now required basic services.

U.S. Seeks Just, Sustainable Peace

¶4. (SBU) S/E Natsios recalled his first visit to Darfur in 1990 near the end of the previous Fur-Arab war and said that the U.S. sought a just settlement to the current crisis to avoid future conflicts. The U.S. was looking forward to the Libya talks, where the critical issue would be a cessation of hostilities, said S/E Natsios. He urged Mahmoud--as an experienced negotiator--to use his influence to mitigate tribal violence in his state and asked that the police ensure security for the delivery of humanitarian assistance to the people of South Darfur, which has been hindered by frequent car-jackings of NGO vehicles. S/E Natsios also expressed concern that some groups opposed the UN-AU Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) and requested the governor's help in convincing the hold-outs that UNAMID was a neutral force that would bring stability.

Rare Moment of Opportunity for U.S.-Sudan Relations

¶5. (SBU) CDA Fernandez said that the current period offered the potential for an improvement in the U.S.-Sudan bilateral relationship. Sudan could create a "positive environment" for this improvement by facilitating humanitarian access and the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1769. Obstruction of these issues, however, would be a "missed opportunity" and lead to a decline in the relationship, according to the CDA.

¶6. (SBU) Mahmoud invited S/E Natsios and CDA Fernandez to a lavish Ramadan iftar for several hundred guests. Natsios

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noted in his remarks that peace agreements like the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) and the DPA need to be fully implemented and refugees and IDPs able to return home if we are really to attain peace in Darfur. He added that the U.S. is willing to be generous in rebuilding Darfur but only if there is peace and security and a political settlement. Mahmoud responded that Sudan truly wants a better relationship with the U.S. The Government is sincere in wanting to implement UNSCR 1769 but asks the U.S. to pressure the rebels at least as much as the Khartoum regime.

Comment

¶7. (SBU) A Darfur native but newcomer to politics in his region, Mahmoud represents a qualitative improvement over his predecessor. Whether his remarks represent anything more than a cosmetic "charm offensive" by the regime's more polished figures will be borne out by the facts on the ground on issues like UNAMID and a cease-fire. End comment.

¶8. (U) S/E Natsios cleared this message.
FERNANDEZ